

VU Research Portal

Wearing a headscarf is my personal choice

Bartels, E.A.C.

published in

Journal of Islam and Christian-Moslim Relations
2005

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1080/0959641052000313219](https://doi.org/10.1080/0959641052000313219)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Bartels, E. A. C. (2005). Wearing a headscarf is my personal choice. *Journal of Islam and Christian-Moslim Relations*, 16(1), 15-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0959641052000313219>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

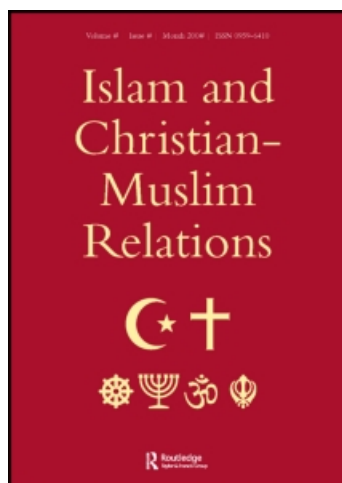
This article was downloaded by: [Vrije Universiteit, Library]

On: 27 May 2011

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 907218003]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713424660>

'Wearing a headscarf is my personal choice' (Jasmina, 16 years)

Edien Bartels

Online publication date: 14 October 2010

To cite this Article Bartels, Edien(2005) "Wearing a headscarf is my personal choice' (Jasmina, 16 years)', Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, 16: 1, 15 – 28

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/0959641052000313219

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0959641052000313219>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

‘Wearing a Headscarf is my Personal Choice’ (Jasmina, 16 years)

EDIEN BARTELS

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam

ABSTRACT ‘Wearing a headscarf is my personal choice.’ With this statement, Jasmina, a 16-year-old Moroccan daughter of immigrants, characterizes her position in Dutch society. The headscarf indicates her religion and, indirectly, her origins. In wearing it, she indicates to others that she is a Muslim and a member of the *umma*, the Muslim community. Her comment that this is her personal choice is indicative of the process of individualization that is taking place in western Dutch society, where people are increasingly faced with having to make their own decisions. The process of individualization implies detachment from collective relationships such as religious communities, but the choice to wear a headscarf appears to indicate a choice made in the opposite direction. In this article the author discusses this paradox from an anthropological perspective.

Introduction

‘Wearing a headscarf is my personal choice.’ With this statement, Jasmina, a 16-year-old Moroccan daughter of immigrants, characterizes her position in Dutch society. The headscarf points to her religion and indirectly to her origins. In wearing it, she indicates to others that she is a Muslim, an adherent of Islam and a member of the *umma*, the Muslim community. When she makes this comment concerning her personal choice, she is referring to the process of individualization that is taking place in western Dutch society, where people are increasingly faced with having to make their own decisions. The process of individualization points to the process whereby individuals become detached from collective relationships such as religious communities, but the choice to wear a headscarf appears to indicate a choice made in the opposite direction. And Jasmina is no exception. In areas of the city in which many Turks and Moroccans live, the headscarf is a part of what one commonly sees on the street. In the Netherlands Islam is also expanding in organizational terms. The number of mosques is increasing, there are already 39 Islamic primary schools, two Islamic high schools and two (as yet unrecognized) private Islamic universities, in Rotterdam and in Schiedam. How should we interpret this comment from Jasmina about her choice to follow and express her faith?

Correspondence Address: Edien Bartels, Vrije Universiteit, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, De Boelelaan 1081c, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Immigrant young people seem to be caught 'between two cultures', as popular discourse has it, or as they refer to it themselves. What do they mean by this? The values to which people in Dutch society give top priority are different from those held in Moroccan society. The emphasis in Dutch society lies on autonomy, independence and individuality. For Moroccans, the focus is more on honour and disgrace, the family and group solidarity. So do young Moroccan immigrants not find themselves in a no man's land, between Dutch society and the Moroccan community? Are Dutch society and the Moroccan community at opposite poles from each other? Pels (1998) shows how the goals of child-rearing in Moroccan families are changing and that notions such as social autonomy are the points of focus.¹ Can the situation of Muslim young people from immigrant families really be expressed in these theoretical discussions, in which contradistinctions are so much the centre of focus? Is not the reality much more about a situation in which shifts are taking place and new interpretations are being given to the cultural baggage that their parents have passed on to them? Are not these different interpretations coming about in part under the influence of the human relationships existing within the Dutch population of which Moroccans are part? In other words: can the situation of Muslim young people from immigrant families be characterized by the differences typically noted between Dutch culture and Moroccan culture?

In this article I would like to investigate why the characterization of 'between two cultures', as Moroccan girls themselves refer to their situation, is not a useful description in scientific terms of the religious experience and identity of Moroccan girls. I will also discuss how it can serve as a metaphor for the inner conflict these girls experience. I develop a picture of compliance with Islamic religious precepts which accurately represents the views of girls and women who take this compliance with them into the outside world and which can be situated among ideas about culture from an anthropological perspective. The aim of this article is to show how following Islam and wearing the headscarf can be seen in the context of the process of individualization that is taking place in western Dutch society. The point of departure for this is the anthropological view of culture as a model of reality that is (re)produced in concrete actions. This pertains not only to the reproduction of existing models of reality, but also to changes through which new models are produced. I will provide a short overview of the discussion surrounding the headscarf in the Netherlands and the problems that Moroccan girls confront when they try to adhere to Islamic rules. This article is based on anthropological research conducted among Moroccan youngsters² who attend the homework assistance programme at the Nour mosque in Gouda, a small town in the western part of the Netherlands.³

The Headscarf

The headscarf is a recurrent subject of fierce debate at many levels. Since 1985 there have been several so-called headscarf affairs (Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 1985; Rath *et al.*, 1996). Since then, there have been many robust discussions conducted. Lutz (1996, p. 128) describes how between 1989 and 1994 the national newspapers focused on this subject 99 times. After 1994, it continued. The theme of acceptance appears to be shifting to other subjects. Sometime around Christmas 1999, the request of three Muslim students at a public school for an area where they could pray during Ramadan was picked up by the press and discussed in political circles.

Recently this matter of the headscarf has again become the subject of media attention. A discussion has been launched about the acceptability of the wearing of headscarves by police officers, teachers in public schools, editors of a feminist magazine and employees in a court of law. In particular, the discussions in France, and the French law concerning the prohibition of headscarves in public schools, has stirred up discussions in the Netherlands. The most familiar argument against this practice is that it represents a form of oppression and coercion exercised by men – the imam, fathers and brothers. It is noteworthy that the girls and women in question are hardly ever allowed to speak about why they choose to wear the headscarf. Why do Muslim girls decide to do so? Is it under threat of having their heads shaved, as was stated in a letter sent to the *Volkskrant* newspaper, or because they would otherwise not be allowed to go to school? Who is coercing them? Or do they wear it voluntarily? If so, why do they make this choice? In order to answer these questions, a study was conducted among Moroccan girls in Gouda, a small town in the western part of Holland, who are attending the homework assistance project in the Nour mosque.

Moroccan Girls and Islam

At around 3 p.m. each day the Nour mosque in Gouda and the area around it are teeming with young people. They come to the mosque for homework assistance. This seems to be extraordinary. Young people usually go to the mosque less often than adults, and girls/women in Morocco only go in special circumstances. Until approximately a decade ago, it was a well-known problem in the Netherlands that Muslim girls from immigrant families were often taken out of school when they entered puberty. It seems that their honour and good name were at stake in the community. Today this is no longer the case, but girls do come up against problems regarding moving on to higher levels of education and their freedom of action. Boys are confronted by different problems. They leave school without a diploma and therefore have no opportunities in the job market. At this mosque, teenage girls are accepted, given help with their homework, advised concerning conflicts with their parents and at school, and encouraged to spend their free time together. Girls learn how to deal with questions about why they wear a headscarf, problems concerning virginity, and the differences that should be observed between their relations with men and their relations with women. Boys are helped with their homework, reminded of their responsibilities and provided with sports activities.

This homework assistance programme was set up as an assistance project for vulnerable young people in underprivileged circumstances. It has been so successful that in the last ten years it has grown from involving only a few secondary schools to having 130 participants aged from 11 to 20 (including girls and boys from group eight of primary school). This assistance is not only for Moroccan young people. Turkish, Iraqi, Moluccan and Dutch young people also attend. Islamic rules are maintained, however – girls and boys are segregated.

C. Dominicus-Groot conducted research among the girls attending the homework assistance programme (see Dominicus-Groot, 2000). She describes how these girls feel at home in the mosque and the programme. They speak, for instance, of the 'outside' when referring to the world outside the home, where they must face questions about Islamic rules of conduct. The concepts of *ḥarām* (forbidden) and *ḥalāl* (permitted) in particular are key concepts against which Islamic rules of conduct are tested. These rules of

conduct pertain to different areas. They focus, for example, on the notions of 'pure' and 'impure'. Contact with blood, bodily fluids, impure food such as pork and non-ritually slaughtered meat and impure drinks such as alcohol, all bring people into a state of impurity. There are also rules governing how men and women relate to one another, physical development, sexuality, and the relationship between parent and child. 'Outside' these rules are not known or girls are sometimes forced to violate them, engaging in behaviour that is *ḥarām*. 'Inside' these rules are not always clearly defined; they are sometimes the subject of discussion and their interpretation differs. 'Outside' the girls often experience ignorance and sometimes animosity and there is in any case a strong pressure to conform to what is seen in the Netherlands as the norm and to distance oneself from the Islamic rules. 'Inside' discussions are focused on achieving clarity and agreement on how a Muslim female should behave in a non-Muslim environment. In other words: what to do in respect of these Islamic rules of conduct in a situation that does not allow you to comply with them and when you are forced to violate them.

The Muslim young people who attend this homework assistance programme in the Nour mosque cross the boundary, as it were, every day between what they themselves call 'inside' and 'outside'. This continual crossing of the boundary has more consequences for girls than for boys; girls make this visible by their clothing and especially by the headscarf they wear. These girls characterize this situation as being 'caught between two cultures'.

Young People between Two Cultures

From an anthropological perspective and from a scientific description of the concept of 'culture', the characterization of being 'between two cultures' is difficult (Bartels & Brouwer, 1999). The situation of the human being a cultural creature is what Geertz (1975, p. 5) describes as '...an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun'. Culture as being inherent to human existence can be characterized as a continual process of giving things significance. The description 'between two cultures' has a stagnating effect, suggests a static interpretation of the concept of culture and seems to issue from cultures as demarcated entities. Tennekes (1990, p. 158) calls this characteristic misleading at the least. Such a characterization suggests the existence of a cultural vacuum, a type of no man's land – but it is one that simply does not exist. When we assume that culture is a continual process of giving things significance, ethnic minority young people are no exception. The actions of ethnic minority young people are guided by what Tennekes calls the frameworks of interpretation and the instructions for conduct that they possess. There is a difference between ethnic minority and native Dutch young people with respect to the frameworks available. The actions of ethnic minority young people are simultaneously oriented towards different cultural systems. 'They therefore do not live between two cultures, but participate in two cultures' (Tennekes, 1990, p. 158). Moreover, participating in two or more cultural systems is not so extraordinary. In a pluralistic society, most people do this. The special factor that applies to ethnic minority young people is that the cultures in which they are participating are not only different, but also in some respects contrary to one another (Tennekes, 1990, p. 158). These contradistinctions can cause conflicts in their daily lives which are connected not so much with contradistinctions in content, such as the wearing of a headscarf in public, but rather arise when young people have to make choices with respect to their

conduct when loyalties are at stake. The wearing of the headscarf elicits criticism from Dutch people not because the Dutch say to these girls that they are thereby not observing the separation of church and state that is a basic principle in the Netherlands, nor because they think the headscarf is ugly. It elicits criticism because they thereby display loyalty to their own group which, in the eyes of many Dutch people, practises an 'oppressive and backward' religion full of 'oppressive' men and intolerant of minority groups such as homosexuals. Expressions of Islamic belief, such as the headscarf, elicit negative reactions, from which it becomes only too clear that the group to which these expressions are addressed is little appreciated in Dutch society. This negative estimation is also found in scientific research into ethnic hierarchies. Turks and Moroccans are at the bottom of the ethnic ladder, below Southern Europeans such as Spaniards and Italians, Molluccans, Surinamese and Antillans (Hagendoorn, 1995; Roosens, 1998). Therefore, when young people say they 'live between two cultures', they are not talking so much about a shortage of frameworks for interpretation and codes of conduct, but rather about an overabundance of these things and the impossibility of combining them due to the contradistinctions between them and the negative appreciation that they experience as being problematic. If we want to understand the expression 'between two cultures', we shall have to look at the emotional pressure that young people experience in making a place for themselves in society.

Verkuyten (1999, pp. 84, 85), in his study about identities and identification, clarifies the connection between the expression 'between two cultures' and emotional pressure. Members of ethnic groups experience psychological pressure when they do not feel welcome in an adopted society because of their background and therefore feel that they have to adapt to the new culture. These feelings of being unwelcome and the adoption to the new culture create stress that is expressed by use of the expression 'between two cultures'. In acculturation studies, the problems of adapting have been given extensive attention, which explains the key place given to 'stress' and 'coping' strategies within these studies. But how are the 'stress' and 'coping' mechanisms in problematic situations of adaptation connected with the search for one's own place in the adopted society and one's choice to express a religious identity? With the help of the research of Verkuyten (1999) and Thomaes (1994), we can analyse the expression 'between to cultures' and the choices of the Moroccan girls of Gouda. In the next section, I provide a short overview of the research of Thomaes into identity and emotional problems, and then of the model used by Verkuyten of the relation between identity and identification. Finally I clarify the relation between emotional problems, identity, and the choice to follow Islam expressed as a 'personal' choice.

Identity and Emotional Problems

K. Thomaes (1994) conducted research from a medical anthropological perspective into explanations for illness in relation to identity constructions among first- and second-generation Turkish women in Maastricht, the provincial capital of the province of Limburg in the south of the Netherlands. She shows how 'coping' strategies are closely connected with the search for a 'new' identity. All the second-generation Turkish women who were the subject of her research in Maastricht said they had problems concerning issues related to identity. Thomaes expressly indicates that these issues are not specific to ethnic minority Turkish women. She accepts the opinion of the psychologist Erikson,

who said that this identity phase is part of a healthy development of personality in young people. But the situation in which these young people find themselves determines the area in which their identity develops most strongly. For the Turkish women studied in Thomaes' research, their 'being different' formed the basis of their developing identity. It also becomes clear that Turkish women make their own choices with respect to individuality and collectiveness and that these two areas are connected. They make an active choice to identify with the ethnic or religious group and their personal identity is connected with this. Based on these choices, Thomaes distinguishes three groups of second-generation women. In the first group, the women identify with their ethnicity and also promote the interests of their ethnic group in Dutch society. They are not afraid of criticizing both Dutch society and their own group. Their criticism of their own group is primarily coloured by gender-related issues. They choose to accept a 'modern, individual identity' for themselves and develop an alternative to the stigmatizing images held with respect to 'eastern femininity' and 'victimization'.

In the second group, women develop their identity around their religion. After a period of confusion, they choose to follow their faith, thereby showing they can persevere both in the face of opposition in Dutch society – to which they respond from the standpoint of their faith – and with respect to Turkish men. For this group of women, too, their criticism of their own group is coloured by gender-related problems. Collective and gender identity are linked here. Their submission to their religion empowers these women and makes them strong, tenacious and stable.

The third group of women do not choose a collective identity because they associate their ethnic identity with the negative 'cultural' customs they experienced both as children and as women. They also experience religion as being oppressive. The headscarf for them is a symbol of oppression and not of empowerment and perseverance. Despite the disadvantages they have experienced as a result of being Turkish, they still feel Turkish, but this dimension of their lives is not appreciated among the Dutch, who see them more as integrated Dutch women. Thomaes states that the consequences they suffer from 'losing their collective identity' are considerable. They experience no empowerment as 'Turkish women' and have to deal with feelings of inferiority in their fight to find their own identity. These women encounter many marital problems both caused by and resulting from these identity problems.

It is noteworthy that the image of Islam and the headscarf held by the women in the third group – Islam is oppressive and the headscarf is a symbol of this oppression – corresponds with the image that predominates in Dutch society as a whole. These women seem to be optimally integrated into Dutch society and are also experienced as being Dutch by the Dutch. Nevertheless, according to Thomaes, it seems that these women experience the most psycho-social problems which can be discerned through the concepts of identity and identification, as Verkuyten (1999) explains.

Identity and Identification

Verkuyten (1999) indicates how identity should be distinguished from identification. Social identity depends directly on current social constructions and the wider society plays a role in this by, for example, attributing characteristics to a group. Moroccans for example, work the characteristics attributed to them by the wider society into their Moroccan group identity. Identification, on the other hand, is predominantly psychological

in nature and through it a link is made between the individual and the group. Through identification, a group becomes the individual's guideline for thinking and acting. Identification has both cognitive and affective aspects that can be differentiated as identification *with* and identification *as* (Stone, 1962 in Verkuyten, 1999). Identification *with* concerns self-definition as a member of an ethnic group, in other words, self-categorization, while identification *as* signifies an identification and emotional connection, that is, self-identification. So self-categorization, identification *with*, is the cognitive aspect, 'knowing' and categorization of yourself, while self-identification, identification *as*, is the affective aspect, the emotional identification. It is the difference between how people see themselves and how people feel themselves.

How can we clarify identity and emotional problems, as studied by Thomaes, by using the categories of identity and identification? For the women studied by Thomaes, their 'otherness' formed the basis of their identity. The context of the surrounding society plays a clear role in this. What can also be said of the three groups of women distinguished by Thomaes is that the development of their identity is not an extension of and does not show the same characteristics as that of their mothers, i.e., the first generation of women. For the second generation of Turkish women, criticism of one's own group and especially criticism of relationships between the genders is a key feature. The criticism can be traced to the insight that the surrounding society plays a role in the formation of identities. In this case, it is not 'being different' that is the basis for the development of identity, as Thomaes states, but rather the processing of suggestions from society at large via a shift in identity – and this shift is negative with respect to being Turkish and Muslim. On the assumption that the processing of the shift in the identity developed by these women plays a key role, the criticism can be understood – both their criticism of Dutch society and their criticism of their own group. This clearly pertains to a rearrangement of their own cultural tradition with the aid of choices that have arisen under the influence of criticism from the surrounding society.

With respect to the three groups demarcated by Thomaes, it can also be said that there seems to be a different relationship between identity and identification. The first group of women categorize themselves as being ethnic, identify with the ethnic background and refer to themselves as Turkish women. The second group of women see themselves not as being ethnic but as being religious, and identify with the faith and see themselves as Muslim women. The self-categorization and self-identification of the women from the first and second groups appear to correspond with one another and to be extensions of each other. In the third group there is a substantial difference between their identity as Turkish women and their identification with this identity. Although others do not see them as being Turkish, they do categorize themselves as Turkish. Nevertheless, there is no self-identification as Turkish or Muslim. On the contrary: they reject this identification. For this group, self-categorization and self-identification are separate; they categorize themselves as belonging to a group that they simultaneously reject emotionally. Their self-identification and reference sit more easily with the Dutch who, however, reject them as being members of their own group, the Turkish group. If self-identification is primarily connected with the pursuit of appreciation and belonging and the acquisition of a positive self-image, it becomes clear why Thomaes found the most psycho-social problems in this category. From their Dutch point of reference and identification, they reject their own group and background, even though they belong to this group. In this light, the expression 'between two cultures' indicates processes of identification *with*

and identification *as*, which are separate and may develop in opposite directions. The expression ‘between two cultures’, as used by the girls in Gouda to designate their position, does not therefore refer to a cultural vacuum but to an inner conflict that arises from the social and cultural situation in which they find themselves. In harmonizing these processes, people make choices, and this takes place primarily when they are young. It is this choice to which Jasmina refers with respect to her headscarf: the choice of identification *with* and identification *as*, to harmonize self-categorization and self-identification. But which choices do girls make, how do they make them and what criticism of their own group is processed into these choices? For the answer, we return to the Moroccan girls in Gouda.

Formation of Identity

Anthropological research by B. Teunissen (1997) conducted among the Moroccan girls who attend the homework assistance programme at the Nour mosque in Gouda shows that girls can be characterized very differently. She distinguishes so-called education-oriented girls from recreation-oriented girls. The education-oriented girls are focused on school, do their homework and remain very similar to their parents in their conduct. The recreation-oriented girls act much more counter to the wishes of their parents and try to have fun – including with boys. Their focus is not directly aimed at school and homework, but more on a pleasure environment of which boys are also a part.

The education-oriented girls at the Nour mosque in Gouda are focused on their studies in order to make progress, and they say they are inspired by their faith. By these comments, the girls give credence to the notion that self-development is a central concept in Islam. Study, by which is meant book-based learning, is an activity that is highly regarded in Islam. A good person is seen as being sensible, with considerable *aql* (classical Arabic: ‘*aql*) – wisdom, intellect and good sense. Raising children is therefore focused on imparting considerable *aql* to them. The way to *aql* is via *qirāya* (classical Arabic: *qirā’a*), reading/studying. From Islam they thus receive legitimization of their orientation towards school. They also experience their belief as supporting them to work hard and do their very best. Through their efforts in school and their good performance, these girls show their responsiveness to *aql*. They have the trust of their parents and are given considerable freedom of action. Their focus on education therefore enlarges the latitude extended to them.

The situation for the recreation-oriented girls in Gouda is very different. They want to have greater freedom, refuse to follow the instructions of their parents and do not really put much effort into their schoolwork. Parents often have little trust in these girls and tend to limit the freedom of action they give their daughters, which often leads to family problems.

Teunissen makes an additional distinction with respect to the type of girl that attends the homework assistance programme at the Nour mosque, which is based on their attitude towards their faith, Islam. At first glance, this is a peculiar distinction to make. According to the usual view, a child is Muslim if the father is Muslim. This is therefore an ascribed status that applies to all girls, but there are none the less considerable differences. Teunissen makes a distinction between girls with a ‘traditional faith’, girls with a ‘personal faith’ and girls who ‘reject the faith’. The girls with a ‘traditional faith’ wear a headscarf and see their faith as giving them direction. They try to observe the rules that Islam sets for

them. They read the Qur'an and attend Arabic lessons at the mosque. These girls with a 'traditional faith' are strongly focused on education and achieve well in Dutch society. Islam is, as it were, the common denominator from which these girls derive their identity and through it also find their way in Dutch society. The home base remains the Moroccan community. Islam provides them with the possibility of transcending the traditional role of women, to join Dutch society and to achieve as much as they can in that society with respect to their education and a profession. They are also given the space and freedom to do this by their parents. It should be clear that, of the two categories that Teunissen has identified, the education-oriented girls and the girls with a 'traditional faith' are virtually the same group.

The girls with a 'personal faith' say that they cannot follow all the rules set by Islam. They place greater emphasis on the instinctive aspect of their faith, 'the faith of the heart' (Dominicus-Groot, 2001). They are still searching and are flexible in their interpretations of their faith. These girls are trusted by their parents and are also given a reasonable amount of freedom, but education occupies a less central place in their lives than it does for the girls with a 'traditional faith'. Both education-oriented and recreation-oriented girls can be found in this group, and the latter restrict themselves, albeit sulkily and reluctantly, to the limits placed on them by their parents.

The girls who 'reject the faith' have considerable problems with their parents: they are seen as having too much freedom and this is characterized as being 'too Dutch'. This group is primarily made up of recreation-oriented girls who try to 'go out on the town' and have contact with boys. As a result, they sow the seeds of doubt about their behaviour and have a bad reputation. From the Moroccan perspective, it is these girls who 'reject the faith' that run the greatest risk of betraying the family's honour and sometimes they eventually do just that (Brouwer, 1997).

If we compare the girls from Gouda with the women in Thomaes' study, we see similarities between the girls with a traditional faith and the women who are developing their identity around religion. In her characterization, Teunissen does not discuss the process that these girls go through in their development towards becoming religious. So we know what choices the girls make, but we do not yet know what process they go through in what Thomaes calls an 'active choice to identify with the religious group'. In other words, how do the girls come to the point of adopting a position as what Teunissen calls 'girls with a traditional faith' and 'education-oriented girls' who observe the rules of Islam, and what criticism contributes to these positions?

From the above-mentioned research by Dominicus-Groot (2000) into the relationship between the transfer of faith and religious experience among the girls who attend the homework assistance programme at Nour mosque in Gouda, it appears that for the Moroccan girls Islam 'naturally' means a lot. Tennekes (1999, p. 123) indicates that in a secularized society, religious perception loses its self-evident nature. For the girls with a 'traditional faith' and those with a 'personal faith', this loss is not noticeable; for them Islam is still self-evident. This does not mean that they stand outside secular Dutch society. The girls experience the pressure of rejection from the surrounding society and this makes them insecure. The pressure does not make them 'less religious', nor does it make the religion less self-evident, but it does make it clearer to the girls that they are responsible for making the religion their own. It is these girls with a traditional faith who, according to Dominicus-Groot, search for information about religion and ask their parents many questions. Girlfriends and female cousins also play an

important part as role models and as confidants with whom to discuss issues. The conclusion is therefore that girls with a 'traditional faith' themselves play an active role in their environment in the development of their faith. They expressly indicate that they experience Islam as being self-evident and also perceive that they are influenced by the social environment to participate in the faith. At the same time, it appears that they seek out this influence and that their choice to comply with the regulations is their own. Most of the girls in Gouda with a 'traditional faith' say that they made this choice when they began actively to participate in Ramadan.

The girls with the so-called 'personal faith' wear a headscarf less often than the girls with a 'traditional faith'. They say that they are not yet ready for it. A number of them expect that they will wear a scarf when they get married, when they are seen as adults, socially and religiously. Being an adult and adopting the headscarf are closely associated. Wearing the headscarf requires one to be responsible and to behave properly, with *aql*. Girls also say that their parents trust them more when they wear the headscarf. It is noteworthy that parents sometimes discourage their daughters from wearing the headscarf and ask them to wait. They say that girls cannot yet handle the pressure from society this elicits and should therefore wait until they are surer of themselves and have matured. The girls themselves say emphatically that wearing a headscarf means nothing if a girl does not believe in it. 'Faith is a matter of the heart' (Dominicus-Groot, 2001). Bartelink (1994) also finds that 'scriptural' women, women who express Islam (among other ways) via the headscarf, 'conclude an individual pact with Allah'. Being a female Muslim is therefore more than an 'ascribed status' that a child receives at birth when the father is already Muslim. It is also, at least in the Dutch context, an 'achieved status' or, as Buitelaar (1998) characterizes it, an 'asserted status'. The girls who 'reject the faith' choose not to follow the rules of Islam though they acknowledge that they are Muslim by birth. The 'asserted status' implies that choosing Islam and choosing to wear the headscarf are options that actually exist within the context of the 'ascribed status'.

Choice

When a choice is involved, the last question for this article concerns the role played by the surrounding society in the choice to follow Islam. The adoption of the headscarf is not understood as an independent action. Girls react to this by saying that it is a *personal* choice. But how does this 'personal choice' argument profit them in their contacts with non-Muslims. The analysis of Du Bois Reymond *et al.* (1998) is useful here. Today, young people do not make choices 'without thinking about them first'; they do what Du Bois Reymond *et al.* (1998, p. 36) call 'considerable autobiographical work'. These researchers mean by this that modern young people reflect more on their lives than past generations have. Society actually requires that modern young people should be able to reason through their choices and express their problems. It is not only a requirement set by society, but also a requirement that young people set for each other. This thinking through problems and reflecting on oneself, on others and the decisions taken is seen by Du Bois Reymond and other researchers as an expression of increased options and increased pressure to make optimal use of them. There is therefore a stronger pressure to make a choice and so making one's own choices becomes a cultural and identity-forming activity in the development of one's own lifestyle. Making choices and self-determination thus become key activities in the formation of identity.

Looking from this perspective at girls who adopt the headscarf and become Muslim women, it is only logical that they substantiate and experience this as Jasmina does: as a personal choice. Moroccan girls are given several options, including the development or non-development of their religiousness. When they do make a choice, they are more or less required to justify this choice, particularly to Dutch people who ask them regularly about it. With the argument that wearing the headscarf is a *personal* choice they have made, they use a key concept from a discourse socially 'required' among young people that is common in Dutch society. The headscarf as a personal choice indicates that self-determination is involved which has been thought through and reflected on. This paints a picture that is the opposite of the imagined pressure and coercion from the Islamic community to which it is believed Muslim girls are subjected. Presenting the wearing of a headscarf as a personal choice implies freedom of choice – and thus criticism is prevented.

But the strategic use of 'personal choice' does not mean that the headscarf is simply adopted from the tradition that is passed on to them; rather they reflect on and reinterpret this tradition. By choosing Islam, girls define themselves as Muslims, a self-definition or self-categorization in which being Moroccan is adopted conditionally. Verkuyten (1999) calls this a self-definition that transcends ethnicity. Women Muslims say that they follow Islam and not cultural customs. They want to challenge cultural customs such as the subordinate position and deprecation of women, by searching for the truth about the faith in the Holy Scriptures. Islam asks them to search for the straight and narrow path. So, for Muslim women, the discussion of which cultural customs they will accept is an open one.

Conclusion

Adopting the headscarf cannot be explained using the model in which cultures are compared. The adoption of the headscarf seems rather to be a personal interpretation, in the new situation, of the cultural baggage that the parents have brought with them from the country of origin. The parents' models of reality are not reproduced. Under the influence of the situation in which immigrants find themselves in the Netherlands, they produce instead new models into which the old models are incorporated. So it is not a matter of reproducing existing models of reality, but rather of making changes to them to create new models. Following Islam is emphatically presented as a 'personal choice'. The girls take the discourse on choice from Dutch society. By combining this with their own themes, the rearrangement and change becomes visible.

With the argument that it is their personal choice, they use a socially required key concept among young Dutch people. This implies self-determination and reflection, exactly the opposite of the oppression of women and coercion exercised by men in Islamic community, as supposed by Dutch society. So this emphasis on 'personal choice' is not only a question of participation in the mainstream discourse in Dutch society among young people. It implies at the same time a strategic use of the mainstream discourse by Moroccan girls. It is possible that it pre-empted criticism from Dutch society on the one hand and changes interpretations in their own community on the other. The headscarf as a personal choice appears as criticism of the parental community. In their new personal interpretation of following Islam and wearing the headscarf, there is room for responsible adult women who can make their own choices and be trusted; but there is no room for the oppression of women. That is seen as being cultural baggage that can be discarded on the basis of study of the religious sources. Choosing Islam is for

them a self-definition in which the presentation of a self-confident and responsible woman is evident.

It is not a collective relationship, but rather a personal one that the headscarf symbolizes. Moroccan girls create their own lifestyle and identity by making their own choices. Self-determination and making personal choices, including the choice to wear the headscarf, is a key-activity in identity-formation, typical for the process of individualization in western Dutch society. So the situation of Muslim young people from immigrant families cannot be characterized by the differences typically pointed out between Dutch culture and Moroccan culture. Moroccan young people make their interpretations in the context of the same processes as their Dutch peers, the processes of individualization, and under the influence of the human relationships existing within Dutch society of which Moroccans are part.

Notes

1. Social autonomy stands for honesty, openness, taking responsibility for oneself and others. Autonomy is not synonymous here with independence, breaking free, or going one's own way.
2. This research is conducted among girls and boys. In this article we focus on the girls. In a later study we shall focus on ways in which Moroccan boys identify themselves.
3. Students and myself conducted the research among the youngsters (most of them Moroccan, a few Dutch, Turkish and Iraqi) who attend this homework assistance programme at the Nour mosque in Gouda and their parents. (Anthropological publications about this research are: Bleichrodt, 1996; De Koning, 1997; Teunissen, 1997; Beukers-Baaijens, 1998; Dominicus-Groot, 2000; Berg-Rodenburg, 2000; Hermans, 2000; Van Omme, 2000; Baeten, 2001; Wiers, 2002; Van Zurk, 2002, 2003; Poleij, 2003; Soorsma, 2003; Woldhuis, 2004). Gouda has $\pm 70,000$ inhabitants, $\pm 10\%$ of them Moroccans.

References

- Baeten, M. (2001) Het belang van onderwijs centraal. Het bevorderen van op onderwijs gericht gedrag van leerlingen en hun ouders bij de huiswerkbegeleiding van Moskee Nour & Regionaal Centrum voor Jeugdhulpverlening/Het Woonhuis (The importance of education is central. The support of behaviour oriented towards education by pupils and their parents in the homework assistance programme of the Nour mosque and the Regional Centrum for Youth Assistance/Het Woonhuis), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Bartelink, Y. (1994) Vrouwen over islam. Geloofsvoorstellingen en -praktijken van Marokkaanse migranten in Nederland (Brabant) (Women on Islam. Religious depictions and practices of Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands (Brabant)), PhD Dissertation, Department of Cultural Anthropology, Katholieke Universiteit, Nijmegen.
- Bartels, E. & Brouwer, L. (1999) Cultuur: een bruikbaar concept? (Culture: a useful concept?), in: W. A. Shadid & P. S. van Koningsveld (Eds), *Religie, cultuur en minderheden. Historische en maatschappelijke aspecten van beeldvorming*. (Culture: a useful concept? Religion, culture and minorities. Historical and social aspects of conceptualisation) (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press), pp. 14–23.
- Berg-Rodenburg, A. van den (2000) Ik wordt een goede Marokkaanse werkende moslimvrouw. Marokkaanse meisjes aan het woord over toekomst en geloof (I will become a good, working Moroccan Muslim woman. Moroccan girls talking about the future and faith), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Theology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Beukers-Baaijens, M. (1998) Geduld doorboort marmer: de systeembenadering van Stichting Woonhuis te Gouda in de hulpverlening aan Marokkaanse gezinnen (Patience conquers all: the systematic approach of the Private Residence Foundation in Gouda in the assistance given to Moroccan families), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam/Research Exchange, Wetenschapswinkel.
- Bleichrodt, H. (1996) Hulpverlening aan Marokkanen in de context van cultuurverandering. De hulpverleningsmethodiek van Stichting Woonhuis en moskee Nour te Gouda (Assistance to Moroccans in the context of

- cultural change. The assistance method of the Private Residence Foundation and the Nour mosque in Gouda), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of History, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam/Research Exchange, Wetenschapswinkel.
- Brouwer, L. (1997) Meiden met Lef. Marokkaanse en Turkse wegloopsters (Girls Who Dare. Moroccan and Turkish Runaways), PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, University Press.
- Buitelaar, M. (1998) Between ascription and assertion. The representation of social identity by women of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands, *Focaal*, 32, pp. 29–50.
- Dominicus-Groot C. (2000) Een persoonlijk geloof binnen de oemma. Een studie naar religieuze overdracht en religieuze beleving bij Marokkaanse meisjes (A personal faith within the ummah. A study of religious transfer and religious experience among Moroccan girls), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- du Bois-Reymond, M., te Poel, Y. & Ravesloot, J. (1998) Jongeren en hun keuzes (Young people and their choices) (Bussum: Coutinho).
- Geertz, C. (1975) Thick description: toward an interpretative theory of critique, in: C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson).
- Hagendoorn, L. (1995) Intergroup biases in multiple group systems. The perception of ethnic hierarchies, *European Review of Social Psychology*, 6, pp. 199–228.
- Hermans, A. (2000) 'Het opvoeden van een kind is als het graveren van een steen.' Het opvoedingsgedrag van Marokkaanse vaders in Gouda, hun opvattingen en die van hun zoons ('Raising a child is like inscribing a stone.' The child-rearing practice of Moroccan fathers in Gouda, their views and those of their sons), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam/Research Exchange, Wetenschapswinkel.
- de Koning, M. (1997) Hulpverlening aan Marokkaanse jongens met onderwijsproblemen. De hulpverleningsmethodiek van Stichting woonhuis en moskee Nour te Gouda (Assistance to Moroccan boys with educational problems. The assistance method of the Private Residence Foundation and Nour mosque in Gouda), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam/Research Exchange, Wetenschapswinkel.
- Lutz, H. (1996) Doeken des aanstoots. (Cloth of offence), in: G. Wekker & R. Braidotti (Eds) *Praten in het donker. Multiculturalisering en antiracisme in feministisch perspectief* (Talking in the Dark: Multiculturalisation and Antiracism from a Feminist Perspective) (Kampen: Kok Agora).
- Omme, E. van. (2000) De opvang van Marokkaanse jongens. De hulpverleningsmethodiek van de Opvang van Stichting Woonhuis te Gouda (The rescue of Moroccan boys. The assistance method of the Shelter of the Private Residence Foundation in Gouda), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Pels, T. (1998) *Opvoeding in Marokkaanse gezinnen in Nederland* (Child-rearing in Moroccan Families in the Netherlands) (Assen: Van Gorcum).
- Poleij, H. (2003) Het is Allah's wil. Een onderzoek naar de rol van religie binnen de (interculturele) hulpverlening aan Marokkaanse vrouwen (It is the will of Allah. A research into the way religion works out in relation to (intercultural) intervention for Moroccan women,) Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Rath, J., Penninx, R., Groenendijk, K. & Meijer, A. (1996) *Nederland en zijn islam. Een ontzuilende samenleving reageert op het ontstaan van een geloofsgemeenschap* (The Netherlands and its Islam. A Secularised Society Reacts to the Rise of a Religious Community) (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis).
- Roosens, E. (1998) *Eigen grond eerst. Primordiale autochtonie. Dilemma van de multiculturele samenleving* (One's Own Ground First. Primordial Ethnicity. The Dilemma of the Multicultural Society) (Leuven/Amersfoort: Acco).
- Shadid, W. A. R. & van Koningsveld, P. S. (1985) Hoofddoekjes in de klas: lessen in acculturatie (Headscarves in the classroom: lessons in acculturation, *De Nederlandse Gemeente*, 16, pp. 275–277.
- Soorsma, J. (2003) 'Let ze maar praten, het boeit me niet'. Een onderzoek naar de wijze waarop Marokkaanse jongeren de mening van Nederlanders ervaren en betekenis geven ('Let them talk, it doesn't hurt me'. Researches on the way Moroccan youngsters experience the opinion of the Dutch and give it meaning) Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Stone G. P. (1962) Appearance and the Self, in: A. M. Rose (ed), *Human Behavior and Social Processes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin).
- Tennekes, J. (1990) *De onbekende dimensie. Over cultuur, cultuurverschillen en macht* (The Unknown Dimension. On Culture, Cultural Differences and Power) (Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant).

- Tennekes, J. (1999) *Onderzoekers en gelovigen. Kritische kanttekeningen bij de sociaal-wetenschappelijke bestudering van het Christendom* (Researchers and Believers: Critical Comments on the Social-Scientific Study of Christendom) (Kampen: Kok).
- Teunissen, B. (1997) Marokkaanse meisjes over huiswerkbegeleiding, religie en identiteit. De hulpverleningsmethodiek van Stichting Woonhuis en Moskee Nour te Gouda (Moroccan girls talk about homework assistance, religion and identity. The assistance method of the Private Residence Foundation and Nour Mosque in Gouda), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Thomaes, K. (1994) *Turkse vrouwen aan het woord. Een onderzoek naar ziekteverklaringen en hulpzoekgedrag met betrekking tot geestelijke gezondheidsproblemen bij Turkse vrouwen in Maastricht* (Turkish Women Speaking Out: an Investigation of Explanations for Illness and the Search for Assistance with Respect to Mental Health Problems among Turkish Women in Maastricht) (Maastricht: RIAGG).
- Verkuyten, M. (1999) *Etnische Identiteit. Theoretische en empirische benaderingen* (Ethnic Identity: Theoretical and Empirical Approaches) (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis).
- Wiers, S. (2002) Sociale uitsluiting in de hulpverlening aan Marokkaanse jongeren te Gouda. (Social exclusion in intervention for Moroccan youngsters in Gouda) Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam).
- Woldhuis, K. (2004) 'Het zit gewoon in hun genen'. Over problemen met Marokkaanse jongeren in het Goudse onderwijs: het ontstaan en het tegengaan hiervan, gezien door de ogen van het VMBO-schoolpersoneel. ('It is in their genes'. About education problems with Moroccan youngsters in Gouda: the existence and how to counter it, seen by the eyes of the high school personal), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam).
- Van Zurk, N. (2002) 'De leraar moet respect van jou winnen en je ouders krijgen dat omdat het je ouders zijn'. Over de onderwijspositie van Marokkaanse jongeren in Gouda. ('The teacher must win respect and your parents get respect because they are your parents'. About the education position of Moroccan youngsters in Gouda), Doctoral/Masters Dissertation, Department Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Van Zurk, N. (2003) Werelden van verschil. Over de problemen met betrekking tot Marokkaanse jongeren in het vmbo-onderwijs in Gouda, gezien door de gen van het schoolpersoneel, de Marokkaanse ouders en de jongeren zelf. (Worlds of difference. About the problems concerning Moroccan youngsters in high school education in Gouda, seen by the staff of the school, the Moroccan parents and the youngsters themselves). (Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit/Research Exchange, Wetenschapswinkel).